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Psychological Comments on the 20th Century's New Man and Utopia

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Title: Psychological Comments on the 20th Century's New Man and Utopia

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Abstract. This article employs psychological theory, empirical data, and experimental perspective to comment on the viability of 20th century communist and fascist quests for the New Man and Utopia.

As the 20th century closes, political quests for the New Man and Utopia--both communist and fascist--seem to have met incontrovertible failure based on contemporary historical dialogue. What does the formal discipline of psychology have to offer this dialogue?

The most popular academic schools of psychology--the great theoretical systems of motivation--seem to suggest that the quest was at best Sisyphean. This is because each school posited an unchanging essence of the human condition. The psychodynamic embraced variants of ultimately unconscious and mutually contradictory instincts operating by the laws of Newtonian physics. The behaviorist: a utilitarian amalgam operationalized as conditioning principles within species-specific constraints. The humanistic: a self-harboring needs for self-worth and self-esteem as nurtured by the respectful regard of others and facing the threat of self-estrangement and self-alienation. The existential: a dreadful tango with life's inevitable limitations--some experienced but subject to no further elaboration through the failings of language. The latest approximation of a great psychological system--that of evolutionary psychology--seems in the abstract to be a variant of the psychoanalytic in that it posits as unchanging a human narrative wherein the motives of today are largely held hostage to the survival realities of yesterdays. These survival realities are probabilities of genetic propagation and are only mutable in the most minor of ways through cultural and social praxis and psychological self-change.

Interestingly, all the psychological schools can be useful in providing rationales for the staying power of New Man and Utopia ideologies. All would suggest that these ideologies respectively facilitate compromise instinctual expression, desirable mixtures of the presence and absence of reinforcements and punishments, feelings of self-satisfaction, meaning in a universe of chaos, and a new cognitive vehicle for old but still influential motivational realities. And even if some ideal is reached, it ineluctably becomes a new reality in contrast with a heretofore unexpressed new ideal.

Ultimately, New Man and Utopia ideologies can be successful tools in developing and maintaining political movements and hierarchies until the latter crumble under the weight of their own contradictions. And this crumbling is inevitable for the ideologies are based on man and/or God as perceived or constructed by man. In this way the dictum of religion being the opiate of the masses had it wrong. The New Man and Utopia--intoxicating, narcotic--have been the real pipe dreams. A sure-bet prediction for the 21st century is that new and old pipe dreams will live on. (See Allen, C. (1995). The world as possibility: The significance of Freud's Totem and Taboo in Ellison's Invisible Man. *Literature and Psychology*, 41, 1-18; Barclay, M.W. (1993). Utopia and psychological theory. *Theory and Psychology*, 3, 173-190; Dufort, R.H. (1965). A suggested approach to the study of utopian writings by the psychologist. *Journal of Psychology*, 60, 25-30; Lax, R.F. (1997). Some roots of persistent homosexual fantasy and the quest for father's love: Conflicted parental identifications in a male patient: Fragment of an analysis. *Psychoanalytic Review*, 84, 843-863; Morawski, J.G. (1982). Assessing psychology's moral

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heritage through our neglected utopias. *American Psychologist*, 37, 1082-1095; Viteles, M.S. (1955). The new utopia. *Science*, 122, 1167-1171.)(Keywords: New Man, Utopia.)